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Inside the Kettle

Newsletter for the members of BBRR

April 2026

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BBRR's Mission:

- To educate the public about, to conduct research programs on, and to contribute to consideration of public policy on birds of prey, other wildlife and the environment.
- To maintain the natural character of Braddock Bay, Lake Ontario, New York for public benefit.

Bird Of Prey Days!

at Braddock Bay Park

April 17-19

Braddock Bay Raptor Research



**Conserving Raptors Above,
Inspiring Communities Below**

Come celebrate with us!

Friday, April 17, 6:30 pm

Join us for refreshments and meet BBRR

Volunteers and LIVE Raptors!

7:00 pm BBRR & Raptor Trivia Kahoot!

Test your knowledge and win great prizes!

7:30 pm - BBRR 40 Years: Conserving Raptors Above, Inspiring Communities Below

Presented by BBRR President, Daena Ford

There will be activities for ALL ages at BOP Days, both indoors and out—so come rain or shine! We're excited to offer a full schedule of presentations and activities, from family oriented to science based, on the raptors we admire.

Saturday, April 18 & Sunday, April 19, 11 am-4 pm

Join us for a variety of programs throughout the weekend!

Full Schedule of Events at www.bbrr.org

One entry fee for entire weekend:

\$5/person (suggested donation), Kids FREE!

Hawkwatching at Braddock Bay, the Start of Braddock Bay Raptor Research

by Jeffery Dodge, Founder of BBRR

Editor's Note: The following article is the third in a series of history articles written by Jeffery Dodge. The previous articles, "Hawkwatching at Braddock Bay" and "The Start of the Modern Day Hawkwatch" were published in the April 2024 and April 2025 newsletters, and can also be found on our website at <https://www.bbrr.org/mission-history/>. This newest piece comes at a perfect time to share as BBRR celebrates its 40th anniversary. Read on to learn how BBRR was born. Enjoy!



An earlier version of the Braddock Bay Raptor Research logo.

Two things happened in 1984 that greatly influenced the raptor centric activities at Braddock Bay. First, Clayton Taylor, a physics student at RIT, started a hawk banding station across the bay from the hawkwatch in an area that is now known as the Owl Woods. Second, the Moons (who started raptor counts in 1977) decided that the following spring, 1985, would be the last year that they would conduct the hawkwatch. On the one hand, the success of the banding station generated quite a bit of excitement and promised an interesting future. On the other hand, the hawkwatch was looking like it would come to abrupt end. What to do?

One thing for certain was that no one wanted all this activity to end. It was exciting, intellectually interesting, important from a conservation point of view, a valuable education asset, and just downright fun. There was never a question that the raptor activities at Braddock Bay ought to continue, the question was how could that be accomplished. The biggest problem was that two individuals had to be found. One to serve as hawk bander and the other as hawkwatcher. These individuals had to be highly skilled in their respective fields. Furthermore, they had to be recruited. Once recruited, housing had to be secured so they could have a place to stay while they conducted their respective activities. Even if they volunteered their efforts, there would be transportation needs, supplies to be purchased, and sustenance to be procured.

Being the individual that started raptor banding at Braddock Bay, Clay was highly interested in continuing his project. What better way to do so then to team up with the hawkwatching project and operate as a single unit. In May of 1985, I met with Clay, Joan Dodge, and Jean Skelley of the Rochester Birding Association to do just that. The meeting was successful and we came up with the notion of forming a group of some kind to raise funds and manage the activities. At that meeting, Clay agreed to continue with the hawk banding activities. Later that same month, I met with Clay Taylor, Dick Mather, and Joan Dodge to formulate a plan to accomplish all of this. We decided to form a corporation and we would call that corporation Braddock Bay Raptor Research. One of its functions would be to raise funds by soliciting memberships for this brand new association.

The task was formidable. In the spring of 1985, there was no internet, and there were no personal computers. We had to develop a mailing list, and create informational and membership brochures to be put into a mailer. Amazingly, one of the avid hawkwatching enthusiasts, Johnny "K-bird" Beilman had just purchased an Apple II in the fall of 1985. This allowed us to develop the mailer and various brochures that were needed. Generously, the Genesee Ornithological Society and the Rochester Birding Association allowed BBRR to use their mailing lists. Dick Mather was able to supply us with paper and copying needs as part of his R&D work at Xerox. Clay Taylor

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came up with our first logo. It was the outline of a Merlin head facing the text ‘Braddock Bay Raptor Research’. That logo, though modified, would stay with the young organization for quite a few years. To be honest, the first mailer was bit amateurish and “Rinky Dink” like Clay’s aptly named first hawk banding blind, but we were off and running. Now we just had to find the right individuals.

As stated previously, Clay Taylor, would continue his hawk banding project. We were so fortunate. Not only was Clay a very proficient bander, he was articulate, soft spoken, and had the great ability to engage with people. There would be no BBRR without him. The former ability allowed him to develop a group of eager and highly motivated banders: Dave Tetlow, Jeff Bouton, Bill Symonds, Dan Niven, Tom McDonald, and Kevin Griffith. This core group was able to accomplish a great deal in subsequent years. The history of the banding project is a fascinating one. I will discuss that in a future newsletter article. In this article, I will concentrate on the hawkwatch.

Now it was time to find the right individual to be Braddock Bay Raptor Research’s first hawkwatcher. As I noted in the previous history article, many hawkwatching enthusiasts in the Rochester area frequently visited Hawk Mountain during the fall migration. It was a good way to brush up on your skills and to just enjoy a good hawk flight during Braddock Bay’s off season. However, being raised along the New Jersey shore, I much preferred visiting the hawkwatch at Cape May during the fall migration. Besides, the most difficult identification issue at eastern hawkwatches was distinguishing between Sharp-shinned Hawk and Cooper’s Hawk. What better place to observe high numbers of these accipitrine species than Cape May. I would eventually come to spend two or three weeks in Cape May each fall for the next several years. So, for me, it was to quite natural to conclude that if I wanted to find a hawk counter for Braddock Bay, Cape May would be the place to do it. I had met several highly skilled hawk counters at Cape May, so I was very eager to see how successful I could be. Especially, since the 1985 hawk counter was an exceptionally talented and personable young man. His name was Frank Nicoletti.

Cape May was a place that attracted birders from all over the world. The skill set of many of these birders was inspiring if nothing else. It also had raptor banding stations supervised by Bill Clark, author of many raptor books and co-author of a field guide devoted entirely to North American hawks, eagles, and falcons. The synergy that existed in the place was intense and infectious. Every night, all the banders and hawkwatchers would gather in the banders’ house, rented by the Cape May Bird Observatory, to discuss the hawk count, species seen and banded, and any unusual sightings and identification topics. It was the cutting edge of raptor identification. Most nights, there would be slide shows of raptors



Casa Dodge—BBRR’s first headquarters. Photo by Jeffery Dodge

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from all over the world given by those individuals that experienced them first hand. To be honest, it was what I hoped would be in store for Braddock Bay. Frank was a big part of these gatherings. Though he was young, you could see that he was well liked, and everyone respected his opinion and observation skills. I could only hope Frank would consider becoming the hawkwatcher for Braddock Bay for the spring migration of 1986.

Frank's skill on the hawkwatch platform was singularly impressive. He had and still does have a very humble and affable approach to the activity. He has extraordinary eyesight and an uncanny ability to discover new field marks. It was unprecedented. Once, while on the platform at Cape May, Frank gave me a sidelong glance from behind his binoculars and stated: "That's a second year female Merlin." I was just happy to know it was a Merlin. I had never seen anyone who could age and sex birds in flight with such casualness. Now it's not uncommon to do so, but that was before Frank Nicoletti set the precedent. At any rate, we watched the bird disappear behind a grove of trees near the South hawk banding blind. I think Frank could sense my skepticism so he picked up his radio and said, "South, did you guys just catch a Merlin?" I could hear Chris Schultz, just back from banding Peregrine Falcon nestlings in Greenland, from South blind answer on the radio, "Yeah". Frank then asked the age and sex (much easier when the bird is in hand than doing so when flying at breakneck speed off in the distance!). South replied, "Second year female Merlin." Wow! How did he do such a thing?



Merlin. Photo by David Brown

I was in the banding station with Frank one day and the banders happened to catch a goshawk. It was an immature bird and Frank pointed out the beautiful buff-colored edges on the scapulars. Later that day, a goshawk was sighted at the hawkwatch and Frank identified it as an immature goshawk. He asked me if I could see light bars on the upper surface of each wing. Upon pointing it out, I could easily see those bars. Frank told me they were caused by the buff-colored edge of the scapulars like the one he had showed me earlier. He was able to see characteristics that a species had, and then was able to translate them into a field mark that was observable in the distance yet looked nothing like what it looked like up close. I've seen him do this on numerous occasions. He has phenomenal eyesight and image processing. And it wasn't just with raptors. On another day at Cape May, Frank jumped up from his seat on the hawkwatch platform and announced on the radio "Middle Earth, (a name for one of the hawk blinds), hawkwatch here, I think I have a raven coming your way." Bill Clark, who was in the blind that day, answered, "Frank there has never been a raven south of the canal at Cape May. Never!" Ten minutes later, Bill called the hawkwatch, "Well, Frank, we have a raven soaring above the blind." That was Cape May's first recorded raven. When I asked him how he identified that bird at such a great distance, he simply replied, "Wing flap."

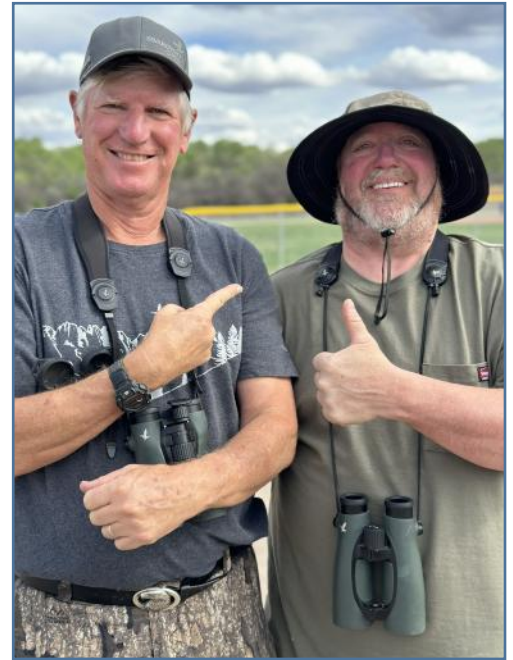
Frank hedged a bit when I asked him to become the hawkwatcher for our new venture at Braddock Bay. After all, it was to most of the hawkwatching world relatively unknown. Looking for advice, he called his Cape May employer, Pete Dunne, and asked him what he thought about the prospect. Frank had already agreed to conduct a hawkcount the following spring at Sandy Hook, NJ. Cape May Bird Observatory ran that hawkwatch as well. He

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(Hawkwatching at Braddock Bay, the Start of Braddock Bay Raptor Research—Continued from page 4)

had conducted the hawkwatch there the year before. Pete, very generously, advised Frank that though Braddock Bay was an unknown, it could be a great opportunity. Thank you Pete and thank you Frank. We were set with our hawkwatcher for the 1986 migration.

Our first spring migration with BBRR at the helm was a huge success, although it was not without its trials. We could not secure housing and sufficient funds to cover all the expenses. So we developed our austere program. That first year, Frank lived at BBRR headquarters, otherwise known as Casa Dodge and Clay lived in a small trailer in the driveway. Joan, in addition to entering data and managing the administrative duties of BBRR, made all the meals for the whole crew everyday, all season, and we sometimes overslept due to watching the Lakers play the Celtics late at night. I think the experience made us stronger and we became a close knit team. It was a solid foundation. The migration was spectacular that spring. The banding station banded and released well over a thousand raptors and the hawkwatch produced a fantastic count of over sixty thousand. Near the end of the migration, Pete Dunne called Frank to ask how it worked out at Braddock Bay. Frank gave him our season totals and he was met with silence on the other end of the line. Finally, Pete uttered: “Well, Frank, looks like you made the right choice!”



Clay Taylor (left) and Frank Nicoletti (right) hawkwatching at Tubac, AZ. Two key individuals in getting BBRR started 40 years ago.

I could never thank Clay Taylor and Frank Nicoletti enough for their professionalism, skill, tolerance, and passion. Without them there would be no BBRR. I wish there were more people in the world like them. We had built a good team and I, for one, could not wait for next spring to see what challenges and successes it would bring. And that, we can discuss in the next installment of this history.

Welcome Back Hawk Counter Maili Waters

BBRR is excited to welcome back Maili Waters to the hawkwatch for 2026. This will be Maili's second season as our official counter.

Maili writes, “I’m so thrilled to be back for another season at Braddock Bay! I’m looking forward to watching all of the shifts and changes over the next couple months, from the Red-shoulders to the Golden Eagles to the Broad-wings. It will be great to see so many familiar faces at the platform, and hopefully a bunch of new people too!”

The hawkwatch runs through May 31. Be sure to follow the counts and Maili's reports on <https://hawkcount.org/> and the BBRR Facebook page and Instagram.



BBRR's 2026 Spring Raptor Education Intern

Please join BBRR in welcoming Jonah Dean as our raptor education intern for the spring season. The raptor education internship allows participants to gain knowledge of and experience caring for and working with BBRR's education raptors. It also provides the opportunity to gain experience in conducting presentations and leading educational programs and lessons both in field settings and through outreach in the community.

Jonah is from Webster, NY and graduated from St. John Fisher University with a bachelor's degree in Sustainability and minor in Biology. He currently works as a naturalist for the Seneca Park Zoo Society, where he works with a variety of audiences both at the zoo and throughout the community. Jonah comes to us with experience in environmental education as well as captive raptor handling, and is fitting right in with our ambassador raptors and education crew. We are looking forward to having Jonah share his skills and passion for birds and the environment with us and our audiences this spring.



2025 Education Highlights—by Daena Ford

BBRR educators had another successful year bringing raptor education to the community. Here are some highlights.

PROGRAMMING AT BRADDOCK BAY

- ✦ 9 spring Owl Prowls were held, for 94 participants. While the owls do not always cooperate, we always strive to make sure people enjoy their walk in the woods, and learn about the importance of the area for these nocturnal migrants and other migrating birds.
- ✦ 10 field trip programs were held. There are always a few spring field trip groups, but last year we welcomed summer recreation programs from the City of Rochester for four different field trips in August. We also enjoyed hosting a senior group from The Highlands who enjoyed one of our best summer hawk flights that day.

RAPTOR EDUCATION COURSE

The class of 2025 consisted of 33 participants, from near and far. We currently have 40 people in this year's class. Participants enjoy a series of 5 online classes, and two field trips to visit the Owl Woods as well as the hawkwatch and our raptor banding station. Look for a future course and classes to be offered in 2027.

OUTREACH PROGRAMMING

- ✦ Our education birds went on 71 outings and did 110 presentations for 4,886 participants of all ages (pre-school to senior citizens). We returned to some familiar favorites including The Birdhouse, Hemlock Little World's Fair and Orleans and Monroe County's Conservation Field Days. There were many new locations we visited, including Letchworth State Park, Baywinde Senior Living, and CountryMax stores in Baldwinsville, Fairport, Webster and Brockport.

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(2025 Education Highlights—Continued from page 6)

- ✦ We travelled a total distance of 3,438 miles across the Rochester, Finger Lakes and Western NY area. Some of the farthest towns we reached in 2025 were Oswego, Hammondsport and Albion.
- ✦ For the past several years, we have brought our education birds in to Honeoye Falls-Lima's Manor School to be models for the 5th grade art classes. In these classes, the birds serve as live models while the students sketch. Eventually the students turn out some wonderful pieces of art, several of which are included in an exhibition at Bird of Prey Days. In 2025 we were thrilled to add another school's art classes and visited Thornell Road School's 5th graders as well. Be sure to come to Bird of Prey Days to see the diverse and wonderful works of art the students have created. Below is a sneak preview of some of the artwork that will be on display.



Raptors in art class at the HF-L Manor School.



**Student Art Show
at
Bird of Prey Days**

**Come see raptor art on display
from
Honeoye Falls-Lima's Manor
School and Pittsford's Thornell
Road School 5th grade students**

**April 17, 6:30-8:30 pm
April 18 & 19, 11am-4pm**

Artwork shown here from Thornell Road School



BBRR Receives Grant from the Rochester Birding Association



For the fourth consecutive year, the Rochester Birding Association (RBA) has supported BBRR's hawkwatch by providing funding for a portable restroom at Braddock Bay Park. Funding comes from the RBA's [Conservation, Accessibility and Engagement Fund](#). Braddock Bay Raptor Research is grateful to receive this support for the spring hawkwatch season. This is a necessary accommodation that needs to be in place for our raptor counter, as well as the hundreds of visitors that visit the hawkwatch and use the park in the spring months. This year's unit is handicap accessible.

The RBA is a wonderful resource in the Rochester and Finger Lakes area, not only for birding information but also as an organization that supports bird conservation in the area. Check out the RBA website rochesterbirding.org for more information on their programs and offerings. Also, stop by and visit with them at Bird of Prey Days this year.

2025 Summer Raptor Count—by Daena Ford

Introduction

2025 was the seventh consecutive year for the Summer Raptor Count at Braddock Bay. This count documents the natal dispersal of many eastern raptor species, particularly Red-tailed Hawks (*Buteo jamaicensis*). Natal dispersal is defined as a permanent movement away from an animal's birth site, or in the case of birds, their nesting site. In our area, just like in the spring, southerly winds can bring many dispersing raptors to Braddock Bay, following the Lake Ontario shore in the same manner.



Juvenile Red-tailed Hawk. Photo by Niki Banke

The primary goal of the Summer Raptor Count is to document the magnitude of the natal dispersal of Red-tailed Hawks through the Braddock Bay area by following a consistent data collection protocol. A secondary goal is to document the occurrence of other raptor species during this time frame as well. Fourteen species of raptors have been documented in the seven years of this count.

Results

The 2025 Summer Raptor Count was conducted for 33 days, including July 24 and 27. There were only two days (Aug 14 and 20) where there were zero raptors tallied, but not for lack of trying. Both of those days had unfavorable NE winds, with some drizzle added in on Aug 20. Volunteer coverage was our highest yet, as was the number of volunteers. A crew of 25 enthusiastic and skilled volunteers covered a total of 131.7 hours. The average daily coverage was 4 hours. There were 5 days where volunteers put in over 5 hours of time counting. Protocol is to put in at least 2 hours of observation each day.

A total of 13 species were observed throughout the duration of the count, including a Mississippi Kite, the first ever for the Summer Raptor Count. The total tally for the summer count was 3,496 individual raptors. Daily reports can be found on <http://hawkcount.org/>. The top four species remain consistent with the previous five years and include Red-tailed Hawk (2,148), Broad-winged Hawk (646), Turkey Vulture (368), and Bald Eagle (278). Both Broad-winged Hawks and Bald Eagles had season high records for the summer count, well above the 6-year season averages of 196 for Broad-wings and 132 for Bald Eagles. Other species with season record counts were Northern Harrier (17) and Red-shouldered Hawk (10).

As with any raptor migration count, the weather can influence the flights and pose certain challenges when observing and counting. One of the more challenging events that played a part for 2025 was the hazy sky conditions from wildfire smoke that was pushed our way from Canada. From August 4-8, wildfire haze was noted, and often made spotting difficult. On August 8, the wildfire smoke seemed to lessen just in time for our biggest count day of the season, which also turned out to be a record day count since the Summer Raptor Count started in 2019. Light SSW winds were steady throughout the count, and temperatures rose up into the mid 80s F. Perfect conditions to tally a total of 739 raptors that day in 4.75 hours. The majority were Red-tailed (422) and Broad-winged (247) Hawks, but a great diversity of 9 different species made appearances that day.

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Braddock Bay Summer Raptor Count Totals by Year							
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Turkey Vulture	361	265	397	384	404	224	368
Osprey	13	11	12	22	11	8	9
Bald Eagle	171	152	123	194	154	184	278
Northern Harrier	7	4	7	7	2	2	17
Sharp-shinned Hawk	3	5	1	7	3	2	1
Cooper's Hawk	12	7	5	8	10	9	8
Red-shouldered Hawk	3	1	2	0	1	0	10
Broad-winged Hawk	307	157	100	312	85	216	646
Red-tailed Hawk	1809	2659	2453	2645	1244	2025	2148
American Kestrel	2	5	1	3	0	1	4
Merlin	1	3	1	3	3	1	3
Peregrine Falcon	5	2	2	9	1	2	3
Swainson's Hawk	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Mississippi Kite	0	0	0	0	0	0	1
Unidentified Raptor	3	0	2	1	2	2	0
Total Raptors	2697	3271	3107	3613	1920	2676	3496
Total Count Hours	116.08	118.17	107.33	125.58	131.25	130.5	131.7

To learn more about these late summer counts, come out to the presentation at Bird of Prey Days on April 18.

Acknowledgements

Without our volunteer counters, this count would not be possible. Thank you to the crew: Niki Banke, Linda Bender, Samantha Cali, Randy Cavazza, Laura DeConinck, Carol Dunn, Daena Ford, Jill Frier, Dan Funk, Tracy Merchant, Sue Mitchell, Dan Niven, Dave Robertson, Luke Seitz, Sean Sheehan, Chris Smith, Chuck Stiles, Pete Sucheski, Anya Syta-Gutierrez, Mike Tetlow, Sydney Thayer, Maili Waters, Bridget Watts, Bob and Tia Williams and Tim Willis. If you are interested in volunteering for the Summer Raptor Count 2026, contact us at information@bbrr.org.

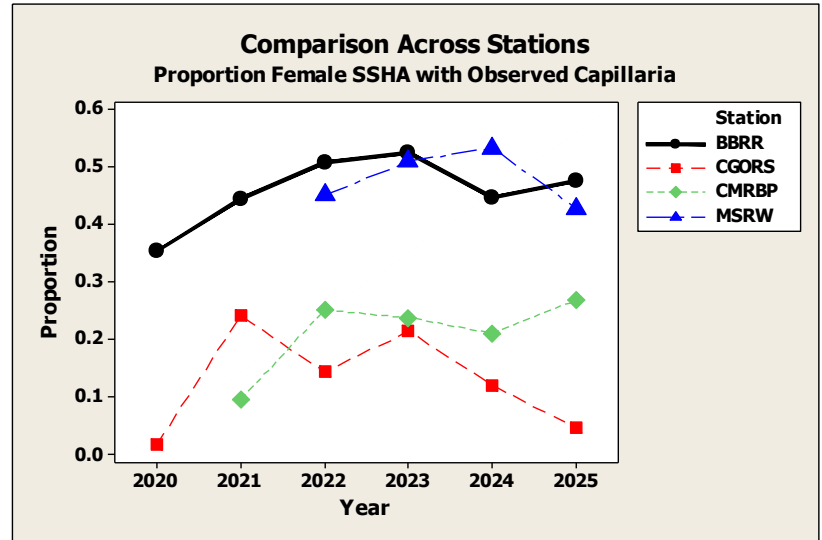


Volunteer Summer Raptor Counters (l to r): Linda Bender, Randy Cavazza, Chris Smith, Sean Sheehan and Bridget Watts

Sharp-shinned Hawk Project Update—by David Mathiason, Raptor Banding Director

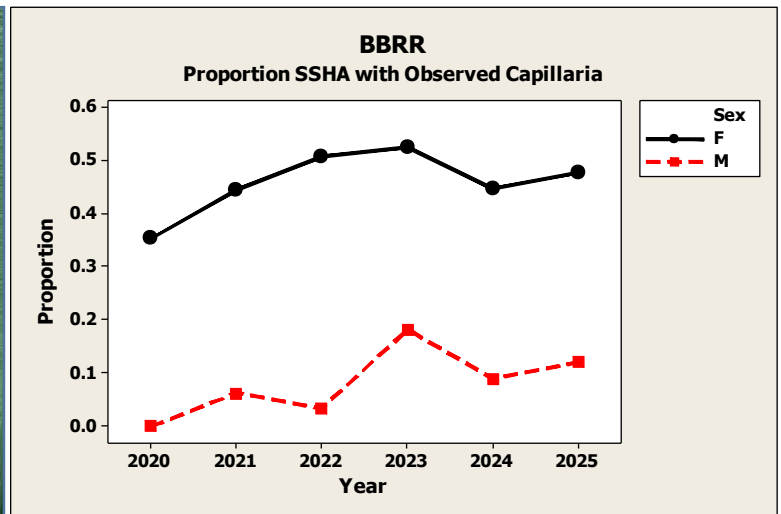
This report from January, 2026, summarizes data collection efforts for spring and fall banding seasons 2020 through 2025. I decided to write a combined report for the four stations where we are having the higher proportions of observed capillaria. Those stations are Braddock Bay Raptor Research (BBRR), Cape May Raptor Banding Project (CMRBP), Cedar Grove Ornithological Research Station (CGORS), and Mackinac Straights Raptor Watch (MSRW). BBRR and MSRW are the spring banding stations, while CMRBP and CGORS are fall banding stations.

The graph at right, for females, tells the story quite nicely. It still looks to be true that both spring stations are similar, both fall stations are similar, and that the spring stations are seeing higher proportions than the fall stations. The one interesting observation in this graph is that for CMRBP, the rate shows an uptick while for CGORS there was a decrease. Note that this graph is for females only.



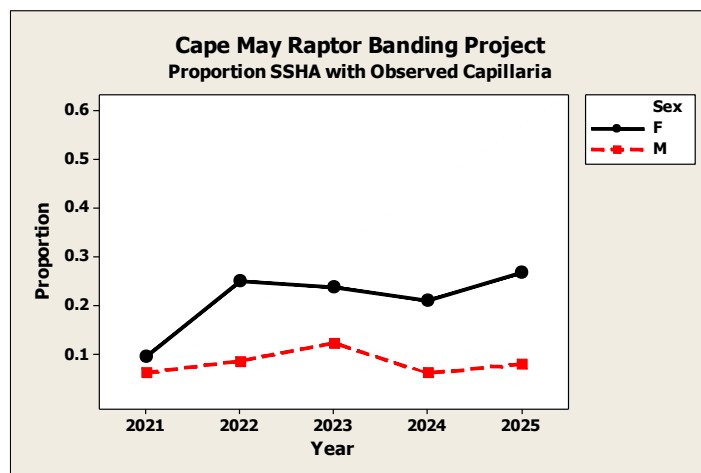
The graphs and accompanying data tables that follow represent the data from each of the sites mentioned above. For more information on the Sharp-shinned Hawk study, visit our website at <https://www.bbrr.org/sharp-shinned-hawk-project/>.

Proportion of Inspected Birds showing Capillaria – Braddock Bay Raptor Research						
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Females	41/116 = 35%	80/180 = 44%	95/187 = 51%	115/219 = 53%	89/199 = 45%	104/218 = 48%
Males	0/9 = 0%	1/16 = 6%	2/59 = 3%	4/22 = 18%	5/56 = 9%	4/33 = 12%

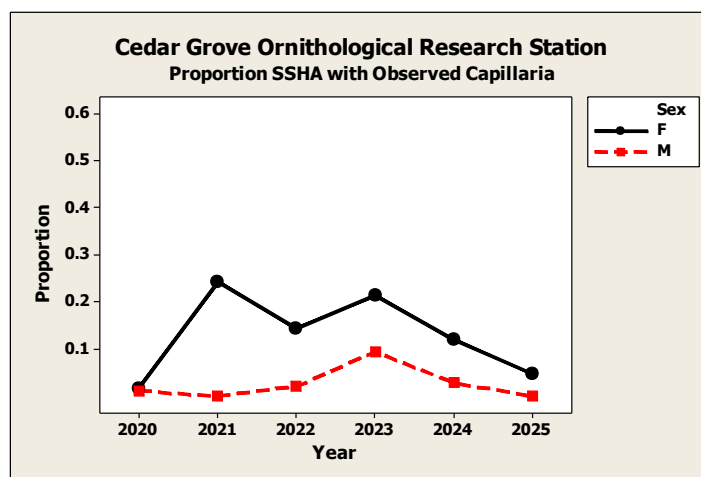


(Sharp-shinned Hawk Project Update—Continued from page 10)

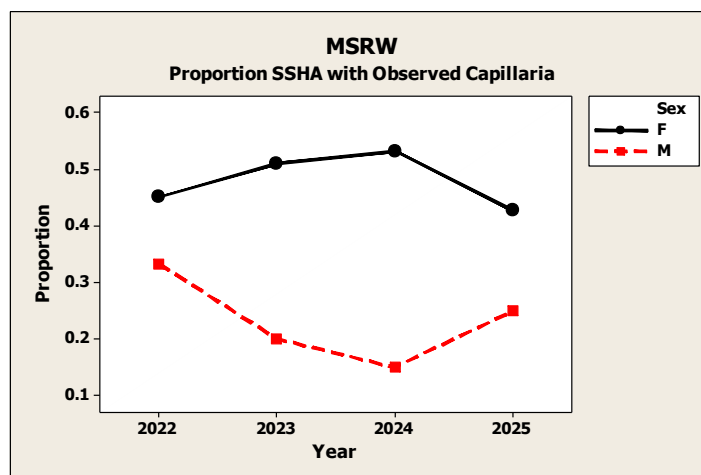
Cape May Raptor Banding Project Proportion SSHA with Observed Capillaria		
Year	Female	Male
2021	5/52=10%	2/31=6%
2022	40/158=25%	8/93=9%
2023	47/197=24%	12/97=12%
2024	34/161=21%	6/95=6%
2025	25/93=27%	7/86=8%



Cedar Grove Ornithological Research Station Proportion SSHA with Observed Capillaria		
Year	Female	Male
2020	2/115=2%	1/88=1%
2021	23/95=24%	0/77=0%
2022	25/173=14%	3/149=2%
2023	35/163=21%	11/116=9%
2024	7/58=12%	2/70=3%
2025	7/148=5%	0/83=0%



Mackinac Straights Raptor Watch Proportion SSHA with Observed Capillaria		
Year	Female	Male
2022	23/51=45%	1/3=33%
2023	25/49=51%	1/5=20%
2024	48/90=53%	3/20=15%
2025	15/35=43%	2/8=25%



BBRR MEMBERSHIP FORM

Renew today and continue to support BBRR's efforts towards the conservation of raptors.

MEMBERSHIP LEVELS

- ☐ American Kestrel (individual) \$20
- ☐ Cooper's Hawk (household) \$35
- ☐ Northern Harrier \$50
- ☐ Red-tailed Hawk \$100
- ☐ Bald Eagle (Life) \$500
- ☐ I voluntarily set my donation at \$_____

Name: _____

Address: _____

Phone: _____

E-mail: _____

☐ Please send my newsletter via e-mail

Complete on-line or send to: Braddock Bay Raptor Research, 185 Pond Road, Honeoye Falls, NY 14472

<https://www.bbrr.org/>

2026 BOP Days Auction

<https://www.bbrr.org/bird-of-prey-days-2026/>

Take part in BBRR's Online Auction and get a chance to win some awesome prizes while helping support the raptors and our programs.

Prizes include artwork, bird houses, gift baskets, raptor programs, and more!



Kestrel photo by Maili Waters

Auction runs April 15 until April 21

Find us on Facebook and Instagram



Braddock Bay Raptor Research
185 Pond Road
Honeoye Falls, NY 14472

